

Death goes high tech

Regina company plans to debut QR codes onto memorials so family can read obituaries on visits.

BY EMMA GRANEY, POSTMEDIA NEWS DECEMBER 9, 2011



Dave Quiring scans a QR code on the grave marker of his father at Evergreen Washelli Cemetery in Seattle, Washington. The code allows smart phones to access more information about the person such as photographs.

Photograph by: Greg Gilbert, McClatchy-Tribune News Service

If all goes according to plan for Remco Memorials, cemeteries will soon be new technology hubs.

In a first for Saskatchewan, possibly Canada, the Regina company has introduced QR (quick response) codes onto their memorials. That means when family or friends visit a grave, they will be able to scan the code on their smartphones and bring up the dearly departed's online obituary.

Remco president Dave Reeson got the idea from a Seattle-based memorial company and figured he'd give it a try in Regina.

"Memorials are getting more and more personalized with photographs, symbols, all kinds of things," he explained. "They tend to reflect in some way the life of the deceased, such as their hobbies, work, family connections."

That story, he said, can be added to through the use of QR codes — bar codes which, when scanned through a mobile device, will direct the user to a website.

"A lot of funeral homes already have obituaries online," Reeson said. "If you can go directly to an obituary, it tells an even more in-depth story."

The process is simple: For a \$75 charge, a unique QR code is printed on a small square of plastic, which is guaranteed for 10 years, then affixed to the headstone.

The idea is that over time, families will be able to add to an obituary, building on the life of the deceased through photographs and stories.

"That already happens in some cases, where families get a password they can use to access an online obituary to make changes, add to it, whatever they want to do."

It may seem macabre, but Reeson says there has already been a positive response to the week-old pilot project.

"We had a 70-year-old gentleman into the showroom who said, to use his words, 'that's really cool,'" he said.

"He knew all about QR codes and was intrigued by the possibility of having one on a gravestone.

"It really changes what a memorial is about, and it's really exciting to be a part of this new technology."

While a grieving family might not be too sure about their loved one's wishes when it comes to a QR code, Reeson says more and more people are pre-planning their memorials.

"That's a big part of this," he said. "And if they would prefer to link to a more personalized site, like a Facebook page, they can do that as well."

In the U.S. the idea of having a bar-coded grave isn't totally out of the ordinary, with companies such as Quiring Monuments in Seattle implementing the system back in May and dubbing it the Living Memorial.

But in Canada, Reeson said he hasn't heard of anyone else doing it.

So who does he think will go for a little black and white QR code on their grave?

"We're targeting everyone, " Reeson said.

"I think older folks are less likely to be up to speed with this newer technology, but then people aged 50 to 70 who're planning their own monuments are more and more Internet savvy, so you never know."

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